Chapter 3

Motivations and expectations of the Ombi-Tara people

Desire for improved standards of living

185 177 The Ombi-Tara people aspire to what they consider to be a European way of life. They consider that by planting a new crop, rubber, under a new land system they may be able at last to realise their aspirations. The first response of 90 per cent of the block-holders interviewed to the question 'Why did you get a block?' was 'to get money'.[1]

In any formal or informal discussion concerning the reasons for wanting to grow cash crops or for being in favour of tenure conversion, the same points were mentioned repeatedly - the desire for a European house with an iron roof, clothing and food from the store. Some more ambitious men suggested that they hoped to establish trade stores or workshops, to buy vehicles, or less specifically, 'to start a business like Europeans'.[2] At least 20 [241] per cent of the villagers appear to consider the change from planting cocoa, coffee or food crops to planting rubber to be as significant as the innovation of conversion.[3] The villagers hope that rubber will produce substantially greater returns than they were receiving from their cocoa plantations.[4]

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[1] The methods of obtaining information are described on pp.1-2. A

[2] These replies tend to support Epstein's finding (1965:191) in New Britain that villagers often wish to copy not only European consumption patterns but European productive activities as well.

[3] Most people had had some prior experience with rubber, either through the Ombi-Tara bush rubber stands or the Sangara rubber plantations, but few had planted rubber as a cash crop.

[4] As Brookfield has pointed out (1958:24): 'It is quite wrong to suppose that the economic factor can be disregarded in native development. Native toleration of low returns is greater only in degree than that of established European plantations.'
A [See Category 128--Analyst]

657 the Yega tenure conversion scheme. An influential minority (18 per
423 cent), which included Charles, both clan leaders and the custodian
177 of the savings account, said that they had first heard of blocks through the Sangara ex-servicemen's resettlement (not conversion) scheme which is about twenty miles from Ombi.

Many of the Ombi-Tara people had at some time worked at Sangara clearing bush, planting seedlings or tapping rubber trees. Six of the seven men who said they had first heard of individual blocks from Sangara had worked there as had ten of the fifteen men who mentioned Sangara in answer to the more specific question 'have you heard of any other scheme where there are individual blocks?' (Nine people mentioned Yega in response to this question.)

Moreover, the European ex-servicemen at Sangara live a life
[185 which many Ombi-Tara people find attractive. Several people sug-
461] gested that they would like to employ labourers and work less hard themselves, 'like the Europeans at Sangara'.

Four people reported that Administration and/or mission personnel had warned them that if they did not use their land 'properly', people from other places might come and take it. Russia, Japan, Indonesia and Manuabada were the places mentioned. I am unable to determine how much weight the Ombi-Tara people placed on this factor in their decision to implement tenure conversion.

After two or three successful conversion schemes were introduced, the demand for tenure conversion spread rapidly throughout the Northern District. In February 1966 the District Commissioner wrote (Williams 1966:3): 'Far from having to sell the idea we have been somewhat embarrassed by the number of requests which have been received.'[1]

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[1] Similar experience has been reported from Kenya (see Healy 1961:77).